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DE RUEHLB #0807/01 1511218
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 301218Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2118
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2437
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 2734
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000807

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/30/2018
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SUBJECT: LEBANON: DILUTE HIZBALLAH'S INFLUENCE WITH
GULF-FUNDED PROJECTS, SAYS LEBANESE EDITOR MROUE

REF: A. BEIRUT 733
[1](#)B. BEIRUT 570
[1](#)C. BEIRUT 608
[1](#)D. BEIRUT 770
[1](#)E. BEIRUT 758

Classified By: CDA Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) "Daily Star" editor-in-chief and influential Lebanese Shia figure Jamil Mroue told the Charge that he advised newly-elected President Michel Sleiman to take immediate advantage of Emirati and Qatari economic and technological assistance to improve the daily lives of Lebanese. Mroue, who has great hopes that Sleiman will reinvigorate the Christian role in governing Lebanon, believes Sleiman can also dilute Hizballah's influence on Shia by proactively rolling out service-oriented initiatives. He stated emphatically that Sleiman must move swiftly before Emirati and Qatari interest wanes, and while Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah is appearing "out of sync" with the Lebanese. End summary.

ACTIVATE LEADERLESS
CHRISTIANS

[1](#)2. (C) The Charge, accompanied byEmbOffs, received Daily Star editor-in-chief Jamil Mroue at the Embassy on May 29. Mroue, a prominent Lebanese Shia citizen who has resided in Abu Dhabi for the past several months, believes the Doha agreement (Ref A) has the potential to be a "positive platform moving forward if newly-elected President Michel Sleiman reintroduces the 'real' Maronite Christians into the political system."

[1](#)3. (C) Mroue insisted that Sleiman's power will not be derived from the cabinet, but instead from the people. Arguing that March 14 Christian leaders Samir Geagea and Amine Gemayel can only impact politics "to an extent," Mroue spoke of a group of "middle of the road" Christians who need to be activated. These Christians, he explained, are "powerful economic levers, involved in education, investment, and reform."

GULF, U.S. SHOULD SUPPORT
SLEIMAN VISION; CHANGE RULES

¶4. (C) Mroue, having met for two hours and provided advice to President Sleiman one day before Sleiman's May 25 election, noted the potential he sees in Sleiman. Having glimpsed Sleiman's acceptance speech during his May 24 meeting and witnessed its delivery on May 25, Mroue declared it the "best speech by a Lebanese president."

¶5. (C) Mroue relayed that he urged Sleiman to accept Emirati and Qatari financial assistance for visible economic, education, investment, and reform programs. In particular, he described the UAE Masdar project (initiative based on renewable energy technologies including energy security, climate change, and economic development) as something that could be valuable to meeting Lebanese needs. (Note: This information tracks with Sleiman's May 23 mention to Charge of Gulf interest in assisting Lebanon in the energy sector -- Ref E. End note.) Additionally, Mroue proposed rolling out technology applications to schools and universities, and said he had also spoken of this to UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al Nahyan while in Doha and with UAE Minister for Higher Education Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak al Nahyan in Abu Dhabi.

¶6. (C) "These initiatives," Mroue posited, "ignore Hizballah and change the rules of the game. Nothing can be done politically to counter Hizballah so instead we should inundate the Lebanese with projects that dilute Hizballah's influence." He argued that these kinds of initiatives would

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appeal to a segment of Hizballah's Shia supporters and to the "leaderless" Christians.

¶7. (C) In close contact with UAE FM Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed and Qatari PM and FM Hamad bin Jasse, Mroue relayed that both were eager to support Sleiman. Mroue suggested the U.S. could play a positive role in encouraging UAE and Qatari assistance.

¶8. (C) Saying that he had recently met with what he called "Sleiman's new right-hand man" Abdul Hennawi (who was aide de campe to Sleiman when he was Lebanese Armed Forces Commander), Mroue told us he passed a message through Hennawi to Sleiman that the president has "40 days to take action" as the "shelf-life for UAE and Qatari support may be short." Mroue told the Charge that Sleiman should immediately launch his tour of the Arab countries.

¶9. (C) Mroue said that he has heard from all layers of society the sentiment that "Lebanon is not worth a dirham without the Christians." Sleiman is the Christians' last chance, Mroue declared, and if Sleiman does not have the tools or "oomph," Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah will be "setting the agenda."

MEET SHIA NEEDS TO
COUNTER HIZBALLAH

¶10. (C) "Nasrallah is not sitting atop a pyramid of immovable pieces," asserted Mroue. (Note: Although his brother, Malek Mroue, has been involved with independent Shia activist Lokman Slim, Jamil Mroue has not been politically active of late within Shia circles. End note.) According to Mroue, of the 2,000 people who run Hizballah, 600 to 800 of them are secularists, and not supporters of "waliat al-fiqi" (Persian concept of an Islamic state). He said they would not have joined Hizballah if offered a formidable alternative. However, he cautioned, you cannot court these Hizballah members with a sectarian agenda.

¶11. (C) Mroue recounted a moment when March 14 Druze leader Walid Jumblatt suggested he enter politics, and he responded

that if he did, he would have a Shia agenda (to counter Hizballah) which would render Jumblatt and his allies useless to him. "In the race against Hizballah, the winner has already received the trophy and it is collecting dust on the shelf," Mroue declared, "It is too late to enter the race against Hizballah, but the "civil" race is only just beginning" (presumably referring to competing through the provision of services).

¶12. (C) "It is pointless to round up turbaned rebels or go for feudal lords," Mroue stated, referring to the Embassy's relationships with independent Shia (Refs B, C), including "fired" Mufti of Tyre Ali al-Amin and Ahmad Assad, whose family name denotes a historically powerful player in southern Lebanon. He argued that these kinds of figures, while valuable because they are "thinkers," cannot connect with mainstream Shia. The mainstream Shia can neither be courted by Jumblatt ("who heads a fiefdom") nor PM-designate Fouad Siniora ("who was left in the cold.")

NASRALLAH OUT OF SYNC

¶13. (C) Mroue characterized Nasrallah's May 26 televised speech (Ref D), which he watched with a Hizballah friend, as an indication that Nasrallah is "out of sync and has cabin fever." Thinking the speech strange, Mroue said, "It's like if you are in a coffee shop sitting next to a lady and you say to the lady, 'I could smash this coffee cup against you, but instead I am just going to just say hello.' Why does he have to mention the coffee cup??"

JAMIL MROUE

¶14. (C) The Daily Star is Lebanon's leading English-language daily, founded in 1952. In 1983, Jamil, aided by brother Malek and Karim, relaunched the paper. After an interruption

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caused by the civil war, Jamil recommenced publishing in ¶1996. He is currently involved in various business projects in UAE in Qatar. He moved to Abu Dhabi in late 2007 with his wife and children to pursue an industrial project.

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